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ABSTRACT

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READING AND READING READINESS INSTRUCTION:
A COMPARISON OF ALL-DAY AND HALF-DAY
KINDERGARTEN PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed all-day and half-day Ohio kindergarten teachers regarding their reading or reading readiness instructional practices. First grade teachers in the same schools assessed the preparation and experiences of their incoming students. A Chi Square analysis comparing all-day and half-day programs revealed more areas of similarity than difference. However, half-day programs placed more emphasis on basal reader materials and less emphasis on building background experiences than their all-day counterparts. First grade teachers reported a few skill and experience advantages for students who attended all-day kindergarten. The all-day kindergarten programs did not seem more likely than half-day programs to use methods and materials designed for older students and, in some ways, all-day kindergarten programs appeared to teach reading or readiness in a manner more appropriate for young children.

READING AND READING READINESS INSTRUCTION: A COMPARISON
OF ALL-DAY AND HALF-DAY KINDERGARTEN PRACTICES

Background and Rationale

For what may or may not be educational reasons, all day kindergarten classes are becoming increasingly popular in many public school districts. Studies of these programs focus primarily on student achievement and yield inconclusive results as to the benefits of all-day versus half-day classes (Gullo and Clements, 1984; Ulrey, Alexander, Bender, Gillis, 1982).

However, what has not been studied thus far, is whether all-day and half-day programs differ in their curricular content and methodology. When kindergarten children attend school all day do the programs reflect the more traditional structure of the higher grades? Specifically, in terms of reading and reading readiness instruction, do all-day programs use more basal reader materials, work sheets, ability grouping and other features of most programs designed for older children?

The concern that reading and reading readiness instruction be appropriate for the developmental level of young children is not new. The International Reading Association and several other major educational organizations published a joint statement ("Reading and Pre-first Grade," 1977) which recommended an informal, language-based type of reading instruction. That statement has been reaffirmed and updated ("Joint Statement," 1986) along with a related statement ("IRA Position Statement," 1986) advocating interaction with adults, independent exploration of print and adult models as keys to initial literacy. Individual educators, for example Willert and Kamii (1985), similarly recommend indirect rather than direct teaching of reading in kindergarten. Even for first graders,

Laminack (1985) prescribes activities which build on childrens' natural language foundation rather than workbooks and ditto sheets. There appears to be a general consensus that instruction for young children should differ from that of older children. The question is, will all-day kindergarten programs affect teachers' beliefs and practices regarding instruction for young children?

Design

The purpose of this study was to attempt to learn more about the nature and content of reading and reading readiness instruction in all-day and half-day kindergarten programs. A checklist-type questionnaire asking, (1) the amount of classroom time devoted to specific curricular areas, (2) reading materials used, (3) reading/readiness methods used, (4) reading/readiness skills taught and (5) management (grouping) procedures used was sent to a kindergarten teacher at 166 Ohio public schools (83 all-day and 83 half-day). A related questionnaire asking, (1) entering level of students' reading/readiness skill knowledge, (2) reading/readiness materials children have used in kindergarten and (3) management (grouping) procedures children have experienced in kindergarten was sent to a first grade teacher at the same schools. The questionnaires were sent to the teachers in early Fall, 1984 and approximately fifty percent of the questionnaires were returned and could be tabulated. Separate Chi Square statistical analyses were used to compare the responses of (1) half-day and all-day kindergarten teachers and (2) the responses of first grade teachers for whom (a) all or most, (b) some or a few, or (c) no children had attended all-day kindergarten classes the past year. The expected frequencies of no differences in responses of (1) the two groups of

kindergarten teachers and (2) the three first grade teacher sub groups (null hypothesis) were compared with the observed frequencies from the questionnaire responses.

Results

Overall, the responses of the kindergarten and first grade teachers indicated more areas of similarity than difference in the way reading and reading readiness instruction is handled in the two types of kindergarten programs. When given a list of curricular subject areas, every kindergarten teacher reported teaching reading or readiness "often" during a typical week. No other subject area received such universal emphasis and there was no significant difference between half-day and all-day kindergarten teachers in the proportional amount of time they said they spent teaching any of the listed curricular areas. There were also no differences reported in the types of grouping arrangements used by all-day and half-day kindergarten teachers.

All the kindergarten teachers reported using a variety of instructional materials such as books, workbooks, worksheets, kits, games, library books and audiovisual materials to teach reading and readiness. One statistically significant difference ($p < .008$) was that 20% of the all-day kindergarten teachers reported "little or no" use of the teacher's manual of a commercial reading series while only 4% of their half-day peers responded similarly. However, the majority of both groups reported using the teacher's manual "often".

Responding to the choices of teaching methodologies such as a basal reading program, chart stories, or informal language and concept development, a mixture of approaches were reported by both half-day and all-day

kindergarten teachers. The basal reading program, however, was used more often ($p < .01$) in the half-day classes. The percentage of reported use of basal reading programs for half-day teachers were: often - 78%, some - 18%, little or none - 4%; and for all-day teachers: often - 57%, some 18%, little or none - 25%.

Given a list of the common readiness and beginning reading skills such as visual and auditory areas, sound/symbol correspondences, sight words, comprehension, language development and building background experiences, most kindergarten teachers reported teaching them "often" or "some". Only one area, building background experiences, showed a difference ($p < .05$) with half-day kindergarten teachers including it "often" while proportionally more all-day kindergarten teachers gave it only "some" coverage.

First grade teachers generally seemed to feel there was not much difference in the preparation and past instructional experiences of children who had had all-day or half-day kindergarten programs. Four areas, however, did yield statistically significant results. Children from half-day programs were perceived as having poorer auditory discrimination skills ($p < .05$), and less experience with library books ($p < .02$). Children who attended all-day kindergarten were viewed as having superior visual discrimination skills ($p < .03$) and being more knowledgeable in the area of reading comprehension ($p < .05$).

Conclusions:

The fact that there were relatively few significant differences in reading/readiness instructional practices in the two types of kindergarten programs is, in itself, a significant finding. There may, of

course, be other differences between half-day and all-day kindergarten classes in areas not queried such as socialization and enrichment. It may also be, as in so many educational studies, that differences tend to occur among individual teachers more than with the schedules they keep or the methods and materials they use.

The areas where differences did emerge between half-day and all-day kindergarten programs would seem to reassure those who worry that lengthening the school day for young children will result in a program more appropriate for older children. Half-day programs were found to place more emphasis on basal reader materials and less emphasis on building background experiences than their all-day counterparts. First grade teachers, however, seem to see a few skill and experience advantages for those who have attended all-day kindergarten programs. These few areas of difference seem to support the views of those who recommend a less structured, experience-based reading program for young children and showed that such practices may more likely occur in an all-day rather than half-day kindergarten.

A limitation of this survey emerged during the data analysis. School districts do not uniformly define "all-day kindergarten." For most in this study it meant all-day, everyday, but for some it was alternate full days (resulting in the equivalent number of hours as half-day classes) or an enrichment class designated only for low-achieving children. When known, classes which fell in the last two categories were not included in the analysis.

The issue presented here is one of considerable importance. Kindergarten programs presently form the base for much of what does (or sometimes

does not) develop into the child's reading skills and interests. As early childhood education grows in its scope and influence in the lives of many young children, the practices used by these educators to introduce children to reading need to be carefully studied, compared and critiqued.

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